DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 270 696 CG 019 153

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TITLE What's a Nice Woman Like Me Doing in a Doctoral Program? Reinterpreting Our Life Experiences.
PUB DATE 8 Nov 85
NOTE 38p.; Paper presented at the Annual Woman Researcher Conference (Kalamazoo, MI, November 8, 1985).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Change Strategies; *Competence; Coping; *Doctoral Programs; *Females; Graduate Students; Higher Education; *Psychological Patterns; *Role Conflict; Role Perception; Self Concept; *Sex Differences; Sex Stereotypes

ABSTRACT

The human qualities which are valued in American society are different from, and sometimes construed as opposite to, the qualities deemed desirable in women. This values conflict provided the impetus for a study of women doctoral students. Twenty women who were pursuing doctoral degrees in educational leadership or counseling psychology at one university were interviewed about the conflicts faced by women pursuing an education. The structure of the study was organized around four dichotomies that recur in discussions of women's psychological development: (1) separation versus attachment; (2) domination versus subordination; (3) activity versus passivity; and (4) unidimensional versus multidimensional causality. Subjects were asked about the doctoral experience, how they felt about being a doctoral student, and how they felt the experience was different for women than for men. Respondents discussed conflicts they experienced in areas of achievement, relationships, competence, normalcy, empowerment, and differences. Data from the interviews revealed that, in pursuing the doctoral degree, women face both internal and institutional problems. Internal problems involve issues of competence, role ambiguity, and role overload. Institutional problems also deal with role ambiguity and with role conflict. The coping strategies of reactive role behavior, personal role redefinition, and structural role redefinition are considered for accommodation or for change of conflicting role expectations. (NB)

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WHAT'S A NICE WOMAN LIKE ME DOING IN A DOCTORAL PROGRAM?

REINTERPRETING OUR LIFE EXPERIENCES

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November 8, 1985, Western Michigan University,
Kalamazoo, Michigan

CG 019153

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This study was supported in part by the Merze Tate Center for Research and Information Processing, Western Michigan University.

Introduction

Women and men experience the world differently. Yet our understanding of these differences is incomplete partly because of the exclusion of the female experience in the articulation of our cultural values, and the resultant invisibility of that experience. Researchers are recognizing the male bias in our conceptions of the human condition. Carol Gilligan (1982) explains:

> The differences between the sexes are being rediscovered in the social sciences. This discovery occurs when theories formerly considered to be sexually neutral in their scientific objectivity are found instead to reflect a consistent observational and evaluative bias. We begin to notice how accustomed we have become to seeing life through men's eyes. (p. 6)

This consistent bias in the construction of our social and psychological realities leads to conflicts in the lives of women. The human qualities which are valued in our society are different from, and sometimes construed as opposite to, the qualities deemed desirable in women. This values conflict provided the impetus for conducting this study.

The focus of this study is on women doctoral students. We interviewed 20 women who are currently pursuing doctoral degrees in Educational Leadership or Counseling Psychology at Western Michigan University. We asked them about their lives as doctoral students. They shared with us their experiences and their feelings about those experiences. These interviews provided a glimpse of the conflicts faced by women who are pursuing an education.

The logical structure which underpins this study is derived from recent theoretical developments in the psychology of women. This structure is organized around four dichotomies:

1. separation vs. attachment;
2. domination vs. subordination;
3. activity vs. passivity;
4. unidimensional vs. multidimensional causality.

These concepts were selected because they were those which were most resonant with our own experiences as doctoral students. In addition, they are issues that recur in discussions of women's psychological development.

The results of our study are presented in the remainder of this report. This presentation has three purposes. The first is to delineate the psychological concepts mentioned above. The second is to explore women doctoral students' feelings of conflict. The third is to discuss implications of the study for women who are pursuing degrees and for the institutions in which they study.

The report is organized according to these purposes. First, four dichotomies prevalent in the literature on the psychology of women are explicated. Next, conflicts experienced by women doctoral students are exemplified through quotations from our interviews. Finally, implications of the study are discussed in terms of how women can begin to resolve these conflicts.

The Psychology of Women: Four Dichotomies

Recent theoretical developments in the psychology of women have addressed issues of differences between male and female

experience. Four dichotomies which represent such differences are presented below.

Separation vs. Attachment

In the area of human development, being a mature adult has long been equated with the ability to see oneself as separate from others, independent from the world. Recently, however, feminist theorists have challenged this conception. Nancy Chodorow (1978) and Dorothy Dinnerstein (1976) suggest that since a little girl is the same sex as her primary caregiver, the development of her sexual identity does not require a sense of self which is separate from her sense of other. In addition, since mothers experience their daughters as like themselves, the bonding between mother and daughter is closer than that between mother and son. Thus, women may have a greater tendency to experience continuity with their past relationships, leading to a sense of continuity with their world in general. Women may consequently feel less threatened by dependency, feelings of oneness, or a merging of ego boundaries in relationships. They don't necessarily see closeness as a threat to growth and maturity.

This hypothesized contrast in the male and female experiences may be due to differing developmental histories. A mother's relationship with her son is not the same as her relationship with her daughter. Because she experiences him as different and also because of societal pressure to encourage his aggressive behaviors and separate strivings, the dynamic of the mother-son relationship may lead, for the boy, to an entirely different kind

of adult experience. Boys grow up into separate, autonomous beings whereas girls maintain connections and experience a heightened sense of relationship with others even as they mature. Thus, the contrast in male and female experience may be due to differing developmental histories rather than to differing levels of maturity.

Both Jean Baker Miller (1976) and Carol Gilligan (1982) address women's developmental processes. Women do develop. But women's development is not adequately portrayed by theories based on the male experience. According to Miller,

> One central feature is that women stay with, build on, and develop in a context of attachment and affiliation with others...[a woman's] sense of self becomes very much organized around being able to make and then to maintain affiliations and relationships. (1976, p.83).

Anne Wilson Schaef (1981) agrees. In her presentation of the "Female System" she states that, for women:

> ...the center of the universe is relationships. Everything else must go through, relate to, and be defined by relationships. This may be why women have historically not achieved as much as men. We tend to subordinate ourselves and our work to our relationships. (1981, p. 108)

Domination vs. Subordination

Miller (1976) addresses the issues of dominance and subordinance. She posits that sometimes differences between people lead to enhancement and growth whereas at other times they lead to deterioration, distortion, and degradation in both individual and group relationships. Most relationships involving differences are also characterized by some form of inequality. She mentions two kinds of inequality, temporary and permanent. A student's relationship to a professor might be an example of tem-

porary inequality. The eventual goal of the relationship is to attain parity or to cease to exist as a situation of inequality. In reality, there are many difficulties with this goal. Society doesn't teach us well how to foster movement from unequal to equal in relationships (Miller, 1976). We also have trouble conceptualizing persons with less power in relationships as intrinsically worthy when compared to persons in the position of dominance.

Some relationships are permanently unequal. Miller (1976) describes characteristics of permanently unequal relationships as follows: Dominants usually define the roles of both parties in the relationship. Dominants usually perform the most desired functions, and subordinates often provide services for them that the dominant group might be reluctant to perform. Furthermore, the dominant group generally provides the model for "normal" human relationships. Thus, since it behooves the dominant group to maintain a situation of inequality, inequality, or even exploitation, becomes the norm.

A frequent consequence of inequality in relationships is that people in positions of subordinance know more about the experience of dominants, than vice versa. However, subordinates may also come to question the accuracy of their self-perceptions if they differ repeatedly from "the norm". Gilligan (1982) provides an excellent example of this kind of experience in describing an interview with an eleven-year-old girl named Amy. The interviewer's task is to ascertain Amy's level of moral development by understanding how she makes ethical decisions. He

asks questions to which she offers replies. He repeats the questions and she offers the same replies. His repetition conveys a perceived inadequacy in her responses. The more questions he repeats, the more her confidence diminishes, and her replies become more constricted and uncertain. Gilligan interprets this difficulty as a difference in world views between Amy and her interviewer. Amy's system of moral decision making is based upon an alternate world view, a view that holds relationship and caring to be the basis for ethical decision making. In his system, justice and external rules prevail. What happens in the interview is that Amy and her interviewer fail to communicate. Her response does not correspond to the assumptions which underlie his questions. Scenarios like this occur frequently in graduate school. The female doctoral student often finds her world view in conflict with the prevalent understandings of her discipline. As her replies to the questions in the field are met with repeated questioning, her confidence erodes and her insights are abandoned.

Subordinates tend to avoid open conflict with dominants both because of lack of confidence and for purposes of survival. Dominants are thus not privy to knowledge about their impact on subordinates, and neither party is in a position to grow and develop as a result of the experience of difference.

Activity vs. Passivity

Because women tend to focus on relationships and service, because they often put the needs of others before their own, because of their greater tendencies toward attachment, they are of-

ten viewed as being essentially passive. In the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (Third Edition) the Dependent Personality is described as one who "passively allows others to assume responsibility for major areas of life because of inability to function independently and subordinates own needs to those of persons on whom he or she depends in order to avoid any possibility of having to rely on self" (p. 324). Given developmental differences between men and women and the resultant polarization of experience into dominant and subordinate relationships, women in our society who do not fit this description comfortably may be even more disturbed than the clinical description quoted above. Women are essentially caught in a double bind. For women, a repeated lack of validation of experience diminishes confidence in their ability to make sense of their environment and meaning of their existence. This leads to increased self doubt, decreased productivity, and a further sense of dependancy on the dominant members of their intellectual environments. It actually becomes a vicious circle.

Unidimensional vs. Multidimensional Causality

Seymore Pepper (1942) in his work on the philosophy of science described four major ways of thinking: formistic, mechanistic, contextual, and organismic. Formistic thinking is essentially categorical and is characterized by "either-or" explanations. In this way of thinking, women could be described as either active or passive. Mechanistic thinking attends to causes and effects. Things or events occur as a result of specific causes or single chains of causes. In mechanistic thinking,

women could be decribed as passive because of genetic or biological factors. "It has to do with their role as mother" we are told. "Biology is destiny."

In contrast, contextual thinking emphasizes relationships between events. To this way of thinking there is no such thing as a single cause. In contextual thinking, the reasons for which women are described as passive depend on the context of the description. For an example of contextual thinking, consider a female student who is disturbed by inappropriate sexual comments from her professors. Her failure to confront them as she senses she "should" may be attributed to a variety of causes: a) past confrontations may have been ineffective in promoting change; b) she may fear his retaliation; c) she may be anxious in his presence, and thus, deterred from formulating expedient verbal responses; and d) she may have experienced insufficient modeling of confrontational skills.

Organismic thinking is essentially interactive. That is, the functioning of any system has to do with the dynamic interactions among itself, its parts and its environment. Continuing with the above example, an organismic thinker would consider the interactions among those causes already mentioned, as well as specific factors regarding the particular professors and their interactive effects. For example, the student may become particularly anxious in the presense of Professor X, and this anxiety or discomfort may evoke further comments by the professor. Since confrontation hasn't worked before, she may respond with anger. This response encourages him to make more sexual innuendos. A

seemingly circular behavior pattern is set in motion which tends to increase the student's sense of helplessness and her passivity.

To summarize, the first two ways of thinking described by Pepper (1942) may be characterized as single cause or relatively binary ways of understanding events. The second two ways of thinking emphasize dynamic, continuous, multi-category, multi-cause approaches.

Gary Schwarz (1982), applying Pepper's framework, proposes that single- category, single-cause, single-effect models of health and illness are being replaced by multi-category, multi-cause, multi-effect models, and he postulates that this change reflects a major paradigm shift in science in general. This way of thinking isn't so new to women, who are accustomed to contextual, relational, or systems thinking which is consistent with their tendencies toward attachment in relationships. According to Schaef (1981), women have always tended to make sense of the world in ways other than the traditional, linear, cause and effect model.

> Linear thinking is efficient. It allows conclusions to be reached and information to be processed fairly quickly. It is not especially creative, however. Mutivariant thinking, on the other hand, takes more time and makes use of more data, some of which--like feelings, intuitions, and process awareness--may seem irrelevant on the surface. (p. 130)

Casting unidimensional thinking as rational and multivariant thinking as sick has limited our understanding of the intricacies involved in multidimensional modes of thought. Women have a special contribution to make in this domain. Just as women may be less threatened by dependence, feelings of oneness, or a

merger of ego boundaries in relationships, so also might intimate involvement in research be a preferred mode of inquiry for many women researchers.

This study provides an example of such "connected" inquiry. The investigators are women doctoral students whose experiences are very similar to the sample studied. The sample was selected purposively and little effort was made to remain "objective." Honesty and fairness were valued more than objectivity in the positivistic sense of that word. The researchers had certain expectations about what kinds of information would emerge in the interviews. Their influence on the material that did emerge is difficult to ascertain, but it is not denied. Rather, such expectations are part of the research model and serve as organizers for interpretation. The study might be categorized as descriptive, but all description is interpretive. Thus, perspective plays an important role in the inquiry process. Rather than deny this role, we have attempted to take advantage of our perspective as women who are doctoral students.

We make no claim that the images we portray here are universal. Rather, we hope they are useful in provoking further thought and study. Only when we incorporate multiple perspectives into our images of "woman" and "Doctor" can we come to an understanding of both which approaches truth.

The Doctoral Student Interviews

We began this study with two conceptual organizers. The first is based on the four psychological dichotomies described in the preceding section: separation vs. attachment; domination

vs. subordination; activity vs. passivity; and unidimensional vs. multidimensional causality. The second is based on Susan Vartuli's book, The Ph.D. Experience: A Woman's Point of View. She and her co-authors explored the process of getting a doctorate, describing the experiences of their women's support group members.

These two organizers informed our approach to the methodology, which was also guided by our purpose--to explore the conflicts felt by women doctoral students. The interview questions focused on the doctoral experience (see Appendix). In addition, the women were encouraged to reflect on how they felt about being a doctoral student. Finally, we specifically asked them how they felt the experience was different for women than for men.

We interviewed 20 women. They range in age from 23 to 51. Their professional and personal histories vary greatly. Yet they share many concerns. They are building lives that include professional achievement, yet are grounded in relationships with others. They live with a dually subordinate role--student and woman--and strive to move beyond the dominant/subordinate dichotomy prevalent in the university. The fact that they are in the doctoral program indicates that they are actively pursuing what they want; but they do so in a culture which is surprised by women who are not passive. They are learning systems of thought and inquiry which are often derived from a unidimensional world view largely foreign to their own.

These concerns may not be uppermost, or even obvious in their minds, however. As doctoral students, they are worried about studying, taking exams, passing comprehensives, writing dissertations, and moving ahead in their careers. As partners in relationships, they are concerned with the effects of this process on families and friends. As professionals, they are worried about doing their jobs well. In the remainder of this section, we present a glimpse of these women's feelings about what they are doing. We address six areas: achievement, relationships, competence, normalcy, empowerment, and male/female differences. Inspired by Carol Gilligan, we rely heavily on these women's own voices in presenting their reactions to doctoral experiences.

Achievement

Some of us are coming to grips with the conflicts involved in achieving in traditionally male realms of life -- professional identity and intellectual pursuits.

> The best things are a sense of achievement, of accomplishment. I'm a very goal-oriented person, and this is a measurable goal. One course, a grade. A paper, comments. Deadlines met. There's a high degree of satisfaction in managing the process of being a student and coming out okay.

* * *

> The best feeling is a sense of accomplishment. I can't say toward what, because it's no guarantee that I'll be richer or more intelligent. But there is a personal sense of accomplishment, and I like that feeling.

At the same time, we may reflect traditionally female orientations in the need for a professional identity which grows from within, and in the importance of making a contribution.

> I'm just starting to feel like I know what I'm doing. I feel a growing sense of confidence in myself. I'm finally feeling

a sense of professional identity. For the first time it's coming from inside. It's great; it's the best.

* * *

The best thing has been a growing acceptance of, and confidence in myself as an intellectual. I'm beginning to know what the problems are, what answers we have, and what needs to be researched next in the field. I'm beginning to feel that I am on the verge of being able to make a contribution, no matter how small.

Relationships

Although many women mentioned their joy in accomplishment, several also identified the best parts of the program as personal relationships.

To be with other people pursuing similar interests and career goals has been really nice.

* * *

I have made some very good friends. I can think of three people that I would not have known as well had I not started the program. And for that I'm grateful, and I'm very happy. I'd also like to get to know the faculty better.

* * *

The best thing is working with people who are on the same level I am: who work hard, who hold up their end, and expect me to do the same. It's great when all of us are excited about what we're doing, when we say to each other, "Look! We can learn this. We can do this!"

These comments reflect our desire to be working with people in relationships, rather than having a life divided between our work and our social life.

Part of why I returned after dropping out is that I like being around the university. I like the people, the atmosphere. Part of it is social, but also I like learning.

* * *

I think it's exciting to find so many bright, capable women. The friends I've made in the program are important.

On the other hand, conflicts often arise when we value both relationships and achievement.

When I was having my baby, I was thinking, "Will people still take me seriously as a doctoral student if I'm pregnant, if I'm a mother?" But I can't put my life on hold. The rest of my life can't wait.

* * *

I feel a need to nurture people, and that takes time. I write letters to our children and parents. I don't think my husband feels that need.

* * *

I remember feeling guilty. Guilty that I was not being enough of a friend, or sharing enough time. I am single, but still, with parents, brothers and sisters, personal friends. Invitations would come, I'd have to decline. People would call, I'd have to cut them short. When it goes on for months and months on end, people start forgetting about you. You get this feeling that they're not satisfied with your end of the relationship. I just remember continually trying to fight off a sense of guilt.

We play many roles in our lives, and we want it that way.

I wear many hats and that's important to me. Being a student is part of my life, but it's not all of me.

* * *

I'm a wife, and I'm a mother, and I'm a community member, and I'm a school patron. I'm all of these other things that don't get the kind of expression that I would like for them to have. I haven't worked in the school for over a year. I haven't had a dinner party in ages. I can't get to know new people in that way anymore. I can't plan ahead and make things pleasant for people. And I don't like that.

Competence

Many of us began our degree programs either to move ahead or to feel more secure in our professional positions.

Because I had gotten my master's degree and gone to work as an unlicensed psychologist, I knew it wasn't enough. I knew that there was a whole lot more I needed to know in order to do the kind of job I wanted to do.

* * *

> I am a university professor. I like being on the faculty, and if I want to survive there, I need a doctorate.
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> I was teaching in a private school and I was stuck. There is an abundance of teachers where I live, so finding a better-paying teaching job would have been difficult. I wanted a change.
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> * * *
>
> I had applied for several better jobs in my field. I came in the top two or three several times, and thought having the degree would give me an edge.

We like feeling that our knowledge is legitimate, and that we will soon have the credentials to use it in the professional world.

> I feel a lot more competent in terms of evaluation as my profession. A friend of mine is taking an evaluation course at another university. She called me to ask for help. When she described what they were doing in the course, I knew it was being taught poorly and that I could do better. I was able to help her more in about half an hour than she had gotten out of 14 hours of class. I'm sure that a year ago I would have just sat there and commiserated with her. Even if I had had ideas, I wouldn't have been that confident about putting them forward, and saying, "Okay, this is what you should do."

But we also question our competence as we go through the program. This begins early on, when many of us are unsure of our ability to pass classes. Two women remember their first semesters.

> That first semester you walk in and you think, "Oh my God! Everybody looks intelligent except me." The men can be particularly intimidating. They come in at five o'clock for night classes wearing their three piece suits, their white starchy shirts, and their crisp little blue ties. And you think, "Oh my God. They must be important. Why am I wearing my denim skirt?" So you sit up straighter, keep your ankles together, or try to do SOMETHING to compensate. Of course, you never mention these things to anyone. You just sit there and melt.

* * *

> It's funny how afraid I was. Even though I was in the same program as a masters student, I thought that once you took these classes as a doctoral student they got harder or something.

Research courses are often especially troublesome.

> I thought I knew something abut research. I taught research for several years. But now I'm facing a more empirical, scientific point of view. I am learning a new language -- it might as well be a foreign language. It's a whole new system of doing things. I think, "How am I going to interpret this?" And all of that causes an anxiety attack.

Even after we're convinced that we can pass classes, we are concerned about our ability to pass the comprehensive exams and write a dissertation.

> At first I thought, "I'm not smart enough to do this. What am I doing here?" Now the comps are scaring me. And I'm not sure I can get it all together and write a dissertation.

* * *

> I'm not sure about the dissertation. Whether I think I actually can finish the degree will depend a lot on the dissertation.

* * *

> I never had any doubts about course work. I knew I could do that well. And now I've passed comps and have to write a dissertation. This is the first time I've had any serious doubts about whether I was really capable of finishing.

Normalcy

We are enjoying our increasing feeling of competence, while questioning our ability to maintain it. We struggle with our conflicting images of who we are or who we think we should be. Sometimes we have the feeling that what we are doing is not quite normal. We don't know whether the definition of normal which we are violating comes from within ourselves, or whether it is a reaction to how we are viewed by others, but the feeling is

there. One woman compares our experience to that of a singing dog.

> I am reminded of a story about the dog who sang. You weren't so interested in how well it sang; it was just a marvel that it wanted to. I always think that people look at us in the same way. 'My God, there's a dog singing." And I think that's egregiously wrong.

Our views of what is "normal" vary. One woman always thought she would get an advanced degree sometime, but not quite this way.

> I had kind of figured I would put my husband through a graduate program first. I kept sort of waiting for him to get done, but he never quite got started. When the marriage failed, I knew I couldn't just sit around. I literally got divorced and started my first graduate course on the same day.

Another woman compares her friends' lives to her own.

> I look around me at other people my age. They are buying houses, cars; they work from nine to five, go to health clubs, go out to eat. On the weekends they work in their yards. I can't do that. I went to a party for a friend of mine who just bought a house. It's larger and nicer than my parents' house. It's in a nice neighborhood. She's a year younger than I am. I left feeling really depressed.

Empowerment

As we struggle through the program, we share what we learn with others. Sometimes it seems that we give each other permission to do what needs to be done to succeed.

> I think one of the turning points for me was feeling okay about asking for help. I still find it hard to ask, but people like X [another woman student who is also a mother] told me "It's okay to ask." She helped me realize that if people were busy they would say no, and that it wouldn't be a rejection, it would just be a reality. So I could then call someone else on the list.

Other times, just knowing that others share our doubts and have similar problems makes us stronger.

> I felt very awkward and out of place when I first came here. I was thinking things like, "I'm not smart enough to do this. What am I doing here?" Two other full time students--women--and our women's support group really helped me out of that. I realized that everybody else had those same problems, and the family problems, too.

When we are able to share our lessons with others, not only do they benefit, but we feel better able to contribute.

> A friend of mine wanted to go to a conference, but didn't have the money. I had learned that even students can get money for professional development, and remembered what a revelation it was for me. So I told her to ask her boss, department chair, dean, grad college, professional associations, anybody she could think of for some money to go. She was amazed. She'd never thought of such a thing. Later she told me that her boss offered a scholarship, not only to her, but to all the other students who worked for him. The expression on her face made me feel as if I had really made a contribution.

Differences

Do we think our doctoral experiences are different from those of men? Most of us do. But we are hesitant to talk about these differences at first. We qualify our views with phrases like, "I don't really know," or "I'm not sure, this is just my perception," or "I don't have any data to back this up." After providing these caveats, however, we do go on to express our views of the differences.

> A lot of men in the program are married. They have wives who are the main support of the family. They cook meals and do laundry. If I just had somebody to do my laundry for me! I mean, I have 47 pairs of underwear just because it's easier to go out and buy them than to do laundry. I've always worked full time and gone to school full time, and there's no time for laundry.

One of the most frequently mentioned differences was that men have wives, and that their family responsibilities are different.

> In our department most men are employed full time, are married, and have family support. I think it would be easier

to have a supportive spouse who cooked meals. I don't remember meeting any single men in classes.

* * *

For women students with families, rather than having the family support what they're doing, it seems like these women feel guilty because their time at school is taking away from, is an intrusion on, family life.

We live in a culture which values individual achievement. Families and friends recede into the background as the student comes to class, takes exams, writes a dissertation and gets the degree. But, as women, we are also aware of the contributions we make to the lives of others in our roles as helpers. We waver between resenting men for the support they seem to take for granted and wanting that kind of support for ourselves. We see behind the scenes of men's success.

There was a fellow who went through our program once in a very short time period, taking 18 hours a semester and ingoring his family. There wasn't something inside him that said "This is wrong to do." Now, I think that's a limitation on his part, but for getting through the doctoral program, it's certainly an advantage. His wife said, "Sure, honey, I'll take it on. I'll do all of these things." I know so many men who have that advantage, of the wife remembering all the little things that need remembering. That's what erodes my day as much as anything else.

One woman who does have a supportive spouse considers him essential. In giving advice to others, she said:

Have someone else go through it with you. I mean someone who serves as the wailing wall, the comfort wall, the person who can run the errands, the person who is there when the children are ill. I cannot imagine going to school full time and working full time and being single. You need a significant other in your life that can share the ups and downs and can do some of the dirty work for you.

Some of us feel that women are treated differently than men.

I have noticed in my classes that the male professors relate more to the men's experiences than to the women's. I have the feeling that the women, especially the older women, are

sometimes regarded as the housewife returned. Their comments are treated as less valid, less relevant.

* * *

I'm the type of person who is not too aggressive or assertive. This is sometimes interpreted as ignorance. Also, professors talk differently to male students than they do to me. Topics are different. I don't know, with them they talk about politics; with me they talk about the weather.

* * *

Men seem to be more credible individuals. They are the voice of authority. I think women are asked questions less frequently. There's even a faculty member in this department that calls males 'Mr. So and So' and females by their first names.

Although it was seldom mentioned in our interviews, blatant or subtle sexual harassment is especially troublesome.

During my internship, I was continually faced with sexual harassment. "If you play the game my way, all kinds of doors can open for you." All kinds of tantalizing opportunities... "Let's go to that conference in Los Angeles." And I thought, "There are all kinds of men who don't have to go through this." Later I found out that this is nothing new.

Not all of the differences we perceive come from the way we are treated or the fact that we don't have wives. Some arise from our self images or from those of our families.

I don't think men experience the great existential angst that we do. They don't go through the kind of soul searching that we do. There is certainly no conflict for them between masculinity and a doctoral degree, as there is between femininity and a doctoral degree.

* * *

Our expectations for ourselves are different. We worry more about who we are and what we are doing. Somehow for women it is not considered an essential. If you have the opportunity, it's nice that you can do it. Men's career goals are more important--at least that's how many families view it.

Finally, we sometimes appear to question our right to be here and be taken seriously. One woman seems to be arguing with her-

self about these issues. Rather than obscure the message, her confusion is the message.

> A lot of these guys are married and I don't know what their home situation is like. I mean, when I go home, I still have responsibilities. There may be more pressure, but that's probably self induced. They feel that traditionally they are going to support themselves or a family or whatever. I can feel the same way--I do feel the same way. It's just as important for me in that respect, but I can imagine for other women that it might not be as important. They kind of feel like they could do this, or they could not do this. You see, for women it's more of a choice, and for men, it's a necessity. They have to do this. But that's kind of speaking outside myself. For me it's a necessity. But for men there might actually be more pressure, especially if there are financial constraints. I don't really have financial constraints. I can take my time. I know sometimes people's perceptions of me have been, "Oh well. You have a husband who supports you so you can just kind of lollygag through the program." But I take the same exams they do.

We have presented women's doctoral experiences in terms of their feelings about achievement, relationships, competence, normalcy, empowerment, and perceived male/female differences. In each of these realms, an awareness of the four dichotomies selected from recent theories in the psychology of women and presented in the previous section may help us rethink the conflicts we feel.

For those of us who are interested in pursuing our degrees, one of the most serious consequences of these conflicts occurs when we question our RIGHT to be taken seriously in higher education or professionalism. Carol Gilligan gives us further insight.

> ...The claim to rights on the part of women has from the beginning brought them into a seeming opposition with virtue. (p. 128)

If, however, self-development can be construed as a higher duty than self-sacrifice, then a woman's right to higher educa-

tion cannot be questioned. But what the women's comments in this study suggest is that women often do question their right to self development, and they equate this development with an abandonment of responsibility in relationships. As one respondent put it:

> Once a male colleague pointed out to me that he considered it to be his God given right to study. I suddenly realized what an enormous extra burden I'd been carrying.

All of us--men and women--must move beyond these false dichotomies. We cannot choose between being mature individuals and feeling attached with others in relationships. We must learn that our relationships can be fluid and not depend for their definition on one person's being dominant or subordinate to another. Such flexibility will allow us to express both our active and passive selves. And finally, we must recognize that unidimensional and multidimensional causality are both human constructions. We can decide when to use one and when to use the other.

When we all participate in creating world views which resonate with our own experiences, our understanding of what it means to be human will be much richer. Women, whose voices have long been silent in this process, have a special contribution to make. We must listen to our own voices -- those inside ourselves and those of other women. We need not deny the reality of the male perspective, but only its claims to exclusiveness. At the same time, we must speak more clearly and with greater volume. It is only in this way that we can make our voices heard, become aware of our own dreams, and focus our energies their realization.

Implications for Women and for Institutions

So what are the problems women face in pursuing the doctoral degree? Although the distinction between the two is not always clear, we can generally consider barriers to women as being internal or institutional.

First among the internal problems in both chronology and primacy is that we're not sure we can make it in a doctoral program. One woman, well along in her program, said,

> Issues of competence have been big for me. Am I competent or not? What do I have to do to prove that I am competent? Will I ever be good enough to really be accepted?

Whereas this concern may not be unique to women, some of the reasons for its prevalence may be. One source of uncertainty is role conflict. The doctorate represents an educational elite, and women, from childhood, are less frequently reinforced for their intelligence than are men. One study (Frey and Slaby, cited in Hall, 1982) reports that adult tutors working with elementary school students were likely to praise high-achieving boys as being competent but to tell high-achieving girls that the assignment was easy. No wonder some of us suffer from an imposter complex: we know how difficult the work is but are told it has been easy! Some of us have been given even more explicit warnings about the dangers of being too smart, especially in the presence of boys.

A related effect is that, for many of us, the doctorate is not the culmination of a planned career path, but it is a developmental step we come to slowly and approach with caution,

telling ourselves and each other to take one course at a time to see whether we like it.

This tug we experience between competing or dissonant values--between achievement and relationships, for example, or between competence and attractiveness--often breeds what is referred to as "fear of success." If we succeed in what is considered a masculine domain, we will automatically suffer consequences in the feminine. One woman, an international student, expressed one of our fears:

> In [my country] it's not really common for women to get doctor's degrees. Men are preferred to have [the] higher degree. It's very difficult when you...go back--things like looking for a husband, a job. It's a little bit overqualified for whatever you do.

Lest we dismiss this fear as being "foreign" to our own culture, another woman tells us: "What kind of people worry about competence? Outsiders. Women. Women who are not yet accepted."

Another source of our uncertainty is role ambiguity. Although we have received both implicit and explicit instruction about what it is to be female, we are not sure what it means to be female and a professional. In part this is because we have few role models to guide us. Our mothers are not likely to have worked outside the home, less likely to have had professional careers. And most programs have few female faculty. In fact, we have few role models or mentors of either sex to nurture our growing professionalism. Several women articulated this concern.

One said,

> I remember about a year ago I sat down and I was looking for a mentor. Particularly somebody here..., a woman who has a doctoral degree [who] could ... offer me some kind of guidance. And I had trouble finding her. I ended up taking

> little bits and pieces of people--the professional stature of one woman, the determination, the ambition of a fellow student, the compassion and empathy of another person.

Another said,

> Nobody that I know of is consciously showing me the ropes to anything. And that's frustrating. I wish that somebody would. I wish that someone would step forward and say, "I will be your mentor. I will show you what you need to do. I will give you some advice." Instead, what I have are informal and occasional mentors..., sort of like a little impromptu, once-in-a-while cheering section.

An additional contributor to role ambiguity for some of us may be the nature of advanced work either in education particularly or in human service generally. In other fields--science, history, art--an advanced degree essentially means more of the same kind of work. If one enjoys biology as an undergraduate, having a masters or doctoral degree may qualify one for a more specialized, more interesting, or more highly paid job. The tendency is for schooling to be a more or less continuous process, so that one would reach the terminal degree earlier in life. This is usually <u>not</u> the case in our fields. In education, for example, at the undergraduate level we study to become teachers. Even if administration or higher education is the ultimate goal, one is encouraged to spend three to five years in the classroom. Thus, what may happen with greater frequency is that advanced education is preparation for a job <u>change</u>, with the attendant anxiety such a move entails. This is an important contributor to role ambiguity--the double uncertainty of mastering both the doctorate and the demands of a new job. Couple these sources of role ambiguity with women's tendency to express themselves in hesitant, qualified terms, and one gains

new insight into the reasons women are often perceived as less knowledgeable than those who can speak with the voice of authority, those who have been told they are smart. One understands why we sometimes feel invisible or inaudible in meetings or classrooms.

Another consequence of returning as an older student constitutes the third contributor to internal barriers--role overload. Having been away from the university for a number of years, we are more likely to have accumulated additional roles and responsibilities. The roles of a worker, community member, family member, student are associated with multiple expectations, which may overload our ability to comply or even cause outright conflict. We often wonder whether the conflicts or the trade-offs are worth it.

The second kind of problem is institutional barriers. Specific conditions in the learning environment may again be discussed under the organizers of role ambiguity and role conflict. From the institutional perspective, role ambiguity refers to uncertainty about the role of women in higher education. One manifestation is a lack of female faculty. This dearth of successful women who could function as mentors and role models hurts both women students and male faculty and students, all of whom lose the opportunity to gain a different perspective. Inattention to women's issues in general often prevents men and women from understanding women's differential behavior patterns, allowing for misinterpretation and continuing discriminatory treatment. The example given above about women's patterns of

communication is one such instance. An article by Hall titled "The Classroom Climate: A Chilly One for Women?" (1982) enumerates such discriminatory behaviors. Women are asked fewer and lower-order questions than are men. When answers are not immediately forthcoming, men are more likely to be probed, indicating that the professor believes they are capable of answering with a little help or a little more time. Women are likely to be passed over to another respondent. Besides differentiated patterns of questioning, women are more likely than men to be interrupted, but are less likely to receive eye contact, informal feedback, and praise.

Another face of faculty's role ambiguity concerning women, and probably related to the scarcity of women faculty, may be differentiated counseling and a limited perception of career opportunities for women. A study by Richardson (cited in O'Connell, 1978) reports the following:

> [L]iterature on graduate education gives scant attention to advisement per se, i. e., the ways in which faculty may differentially reinforce and encourage students' interests through program planning, elective choices, choice of dissertation tool requirements, internship experiences, and informal discussion of goals and career plans. (p. 4-5)

Role conflict is another source of institutional barriers to women. The extent to which faculty and advisers have limited perceptions of women's potential may be challenged by the increasing numbers of women students. The conflict which results may vary in intensity from unconscious to ambivalent to antagonistic. The professor who evaluates student performance on factors which favor men may not be aware of the inherent bias. A study by Reilly (cited in O'Connell, 1976) reported that graduate

faculty rated successful students as having independence, initiative, and conscientiousness, with distractions attributed to non-academic, non-professional interests loading negatively on the latter dimension. Faculty perceptions of the appropriateness or seriousness of women doctoral students colors both classroom and other professional interactions. In a study of graduate students in psychology, Brodsky (cited in O'Connell, 1978) found that males report more frequently than females invitations to accompany faculty on professional trips, offers of authorship for research participation, and encouragement to meet scholars outside the department. Women often perceive that they are less likely to receive the more prestigious research projects, assistantships, internships; that they are more likely to be considered perennial assistant rather than professional colleague.

How much of such differential treatment is due to discrepant attributions of student competence, interest, or motivation, and how much is due to concern over possible sexualization of the relationship is uncertain. Some relationships do develop sexual overtones, and some individuals avoid forming relationships for fear of such an outcome or of the innuendo that may develop.

One women told us,

> I can use my boyfriend for an example. He and his adviser would go out drinking,...they would go out to movies, and they would play racquetball--that sort of thing. [I]f a woman were to do that with a faculty member, there would be a lot of raised eyebrows.

Another woman expressed a desire for "colleagueship untainted by anybody's question about whether it's a sexual relationship."

Fortunately, these barriers to women in doctoral sutdy are not insurmountable. What is required is for situations to be articulated, analyzed, and attacked. "Overt" discrimination is that which all parties recognize. However, given the male bias in our culture and male definition of norms, most men and many women do not recognize when acts of discrimination have occurred. Sexual harassment should be an example of overt discrimination. Despite this, it is often difficult for a woman to immediately discern whether she is being harassed because of her sex or some other personal quality. Women doctoral students often have such experiences. We have all been called "dear," perhaps by a stranger on the phone who might be quite offended at our assuming such familiarity with him. And we have been the recipients of double entendres and other more or less blatant sexist comments.

However, most discrimination against women is covert. When we are not aware of what is happening, we may suddenly find ourselves depressed or angry. Upon reflection or analysis with friends, the cause may be revealed. It may have been a subtle put-down that the woman did not immediately recognize. Finally understanding, she suffers both from the effect of the incident and from her inability to respond at the time. Often such incidents must be rehearsed and stored in the memory for appropriate response when they are (probably) repeated. What we find on an interpersonal level is a reflection of what we find in our other worlds--that assumptions, expectations, and reactions are different for us than they are for men.

Articulation is an important function to occur with women mentors and networks. They help us recognize and cope with acts of discrimination. Sharing with others helps us define our experiences, become aware of our rights, and notice when they are violated. In doing so, we validate each other and from this new perspective, we can adopt or adapt coping strategies appropriate to our situations.

What are these coping strategies? Hall (cited in Hall, 1982) proposed three strategies which may be used for accommodation or for change of conflicting role expectations. The three strategies are 1) reactive role behavior, 2) personal role redefinition, and 3) structural role redefinition.

Reactive role behavior is better known by its popular name, the "Superwoman" syndrome. Women who use this coping strategy attempt to meet all the expectations held by self and others for each of their many roles. For example, if a woman understands that her job includes taking minutes at meetings, it is easy to accommodate. However, if the woman wishes to make substantive contributions to the discussion, then taking notes may represent a mild distraction or a major negation of her credibility--sometimes both. In either event, she experiences conflict. She may be able to accommodate both roles simultaneously if summary minutes are acceptable, or if her participation is also encouraged. Reactive role behavior seems appealing because it does not involve confrontation, and thus does not threaten her relationships with others. Its major disadvantages are the increased need for attention to context, juggling conflicting

demands, and the limitations it may pose for individual development.

Personal role redefinition refers to an internal revision of what it means to occupy a particular role in society; for example, employee, wife, student, mother, or professional. Felice Dublon (1983), in a study of doctoral women's life style aspirations, found that the overwhelming majority of respondents expected to be professionally employed and to be wives and mothers. Expectations for employed-wife-and-mother are both quantitatively and qualitatively different from those of employed-husband-and-father. Personal role redefinition means giving oneself permission to differ from expectations once held for any or all of the roles by oneself and others. Sometimes it seems that our own expectations are the most difficult to revise. It is this task which is often most ably assisted by a same-sex mentor or support group.

Structural role redefinition involves renegotiating others' expectations for one's own role behavior. Should the woman who takes minutes decide that such a task interferes too much with her desire for substantive participation to be accommodated by reactive role behavior, she must first give herself permission to give up the pleasing behavior of taking notes and then gather her courage to confront the assigner of the task. One must be able to point out the conflict between wanting to participate and the necessity of taking minutes and convince the other of the greater value of participation. Sometimes such a confrontation involves challenging the underlying assumptions of others by exposing

discriminatory behavior. Many professors, for example, would deny holding a prejudice against women students, though their behavior might indicate otherwise. The authors believe that most people are teachable, that having the effects of their behaviors pointed out to them, they will take responsibility for making changes.

As with women students, faculty in institutions can benefit from consciousness raising. That women comprise an increasing proportion of admissions requests must be dealt with as a fact of academic life requiring adjusted perceptions, not as a diminution of program. Faculties should first be helped to understand the women themselves and faculty's own perceptions of them. Not only must faculty monitor their <u>own</u> perceptions, they must be more responsible to women in the program by not tolerating sexism from their colleagues.

In conjunction with individual consciousness raising, institutions have a concomitant obligation to monitor their programs both for evidences of bias and for proof of non-bias. Is the proportion of women admitted equal to the proportion that apply? If not, the admissions requirements or process may work against women in some way. Admissions screening on the basis of previous professional experiences must be questioned as to whether these experiences are as accessible to women as to men.

Are retention rates of women students comparable to those of men? If not, what reasons do women give for dropping out? None of our respondents talked about blatant sexual harassment, but we are aware of at least one woman who became so uncomfortable with

a faculty member that she dropped out of her program, to return only when that individual left the department.

Besides the classroom, are women students treated differently from men in any other ways? In some institutions, women are more likely to be hired as teaching assistants and men as research assistants. If their titles are the same, is the work comparable? Is one sex more likely to be asked to work registration, answer phones in the office, make coffee, or do word processing than the other?

If, in addition to struggling with different expectations, women are also operating under different world views from men's, we can expect their/our reactions to a profession defined predominately by men also to differ. However, the institution owes it to itself--to its own enriching dialectic--to listen respectfully to women's voices. Our questions, our concerns are also legitimate. Our perceptions of research, our dissertation topics are also valid.

It is appropriate that institutional changes be addressed <u>after</u> personal changes. Indeed, the need for changes in the external environment may be best perceived by those who have engaged or are involved in personal role redefinition. If we continue to question our normalcy as females and professionals, to disguise our skirts among the three-piece suits, we serve to affirm existing biases. Unless we accept our right to be here, we limit our potential impact. Thus, personal role redefinition may be a precondition for structural role redefinition and institutional change.

As Virginia Woolf said in 1929,

> It would be a thousand pities if women wrote like men, or lived like men, or looked like men, for if two sexes are quite inadequate, considering the vastness and variety of the world, how should we manage with one only? Ought not education bring out and fortify the differences rather than the similarities? For we have too much likeness as it is, and if an explorer should come back and bring word of other sexes looking through the branches of other trees at other skies, nothing would be of greater service to humanity and we should have the immense pleasure into the bargain of watching Professor X rush for his measuring rods to prove himself "superior."

APPENDIX

Interview Questions

1. How did you decide to go for your doctorate? Who or what influenced you? Was it a difficult decision?

2. Are you glad you decided to get your degree? Has it been, or do you think it will be worth it?

3. Think of a woman friend of yours who is thinking about whether to go for a doctorate or not. Or, think of yourself when you were trying to decide. Knowing what you know now, what would you say to her to help her think through her decision?

4. Now suppose she has already decided she is going to enroll. What helpful hints would you give her to make her life easier as she proceeds.

5. What have been the best and worst things for you about being a doctoral student?

6. Have you had any serious doubts about whether you could, or wanted to finish?

7. What kept you going through those periods? Why didn't you give it up? Who helped you? What did you do?

8. Do you think that the doctoral experience is different for men than it is for women? Why? In what ways?

Checklist

1. Deciding to apply, continue, finish.

   Did you decide once, or have you doubted and had to "decide" several times that you were going to get your degree?

2. Health. Have you, or other women students you know, had health problems since beginning their degree?

3. Networking. Do you have a network of friends who support you in this endeavor? Are they students, too?

4. Mentors and role models. Is there, or has there been, someone "special", professionally who has helped show you the ropes, given you a sense of direction. Is there someone you would like to be like? Tell me about that person.

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